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Modern Languages in the General Scheme of American Education.*

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The exigencies of modern life have drawn the whole civilized world into a community of vital interests that renders imperative a knowledge of foreign modern languages. Hence no modern state of importance fails to include in the work of its schools the study of the languages of its most important neighbors. The choice of the particular languages to be studied and the amount of attention devoted to their pursuit varies naturally with the traditional, geographical, and cultural relations of the individual state to its fellow states in the commonwealth of the world. The usefulness of the study depends, of course, in any given instance upon the importance of the rôle played in the past and present by the people whose language is studied, upon the effectiveness of the linguistic work attempted, and upon the maturity of the national mind of the student. The point here stressed is that the awakening of the minds of all progressive modern peoples to the predominant importance of international coöperation in practically all fields of human endeavor has already made the study of modern foreign languages an integral part of all the leading systems of national education.

* Paper read before the Section for the Teaching of Modern Foreign Languages of the Wisconsin Teachers' Association at its meeting Nov. 2. 1917.

America has shared with other nations a gradual recognition of the increasing importance of the study of modern foreign languages. Europe anticipated us in this by many decades. The geographical propinquity of all European countries contributed much to the establishment of cultural relations of such importance as to find early recognition in a pretty general study of foreign modern languages. This was the case long before the creation of the community of interest and purpose, which the past hundred years have witnessed. We recall the fact that modern language teaching began in this country in the seventeenth century for reasons peculiar to colonial life in the New World. The teaching of French facilitated the work of the Catholic missionaries in their attempts to minister to the spiritual and intellectual needs of the red man in Canada, New England, Louisiana, Alabama, and that range of the middle west now known as Michigan and Wisconsin. The prestige of French civilization, especially of French literature, scholarship, and art, was even before the Revolutionary War sufficiently great in England itself to influence the taste of the English colonies in America and to effect the introduction of French into the course of study of numerous schools in this country. Then came the participation in our struggle against England of men like Lafayette and, as a result of this, a greatly increased admiration of the French people and their institutions, which meant added devotion to the study of the French language and literature. This enthusiasm found expression, for instance, in Quesnay de Beaurepaire's purpose to establish at Richmond, Virginia, a French Academy of Arts and Sciences in the United States of America, with branches at Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York. It also prompted Jefferson's desire to remove boldly to Virginia the French College of Geneva, Switzerland, and his zeal to incorporate some of Quesnay's suggestions in the University of Virginia. All this and more was conceived, however, rather abstractly and intellectually by men who fully shared with Washington our traditional aversion to all entangling political alliances and who were certainly not dreaming of a political understanding with France. In a community of essential pioneers, whose current experience was so completely cut off from that of the parent European stock, it was natural that sincere attempts to elevate educational aims and to improve educational methods should be profoundly impressed by the brilliant achievements of the French in literature and art. It was also unquestionably of great benefit to America that our provincial outlook upon life and art was at this time broadened by academic attention to the French language and literature. It would have been a still greater advantage to the life of the American commonwealth if our earlier attempts to establish French instruction in our schools and colleges had been aided by the presence in our midst of

better prepared teachers and by a more intelligent grasp of the situation by boards of education and college trustees. As matters stand in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, sporadic beginnings of great promise were often followed by long lapses of instruction, and periods of waiting that destroyed all continuity of impression. Harvard's experience, from its first appointment of a teacher of French in 1735, presently dismissed on religious grounds, through its three similar appointments between 1769—1780; its establishment of French in 1780 as a regular branch of instruction; its discontinuance of the subject about the beginning of the nineteenth century; its resumption of French instruction in 1816 under the Smith "Professorship of Belles Lettres", with Francis Sales as assistant, up to the appointment of George Ticknor in 1819, as Professor of Modern Languages and Literatures, is somewhat typical of the earlier history of modern language instruction in American higher institutions of learning.

The Louisiana purchase of 1803 brought automatically under our flag large numbers of French people, whose educational needs called for French instruction in the public schools and in the parochial schools of that part of our country. This condition remained until disturbed by the Civil War and by the succeeding movement of reconstruction. Yet the Louisiana state constitution of 1879 contains these words: "The general exercises in the public schools shall be conducted in the English language and the elementary branches taught therein * * * And it is provided that elementary branches may also be taught in the French language in those parishes in the state, or localities in said parishes, where the French language predominates, if no added expense is incurred." A re-enactment of this provision in the statutes of 1906 reads thus: "Sec. 212. In addition to these, such other branches shall be taught as the State Board of Education and the parish school boards may require: *Provided*, that these elementary branches may also be taught in the French language in those localities where the French language is spoken; but no additional expense shall be incurred for this cause." Under this statute New Orleans is the only municipality in which French is taught in the public elementary schools of the State. This instruction is given after school hours in about 15 public elementary schools to between 1,000 and 2,000 pupils. The expense is defrayed by the *Alliance Franco-Louisianaise*, founded in 1908, the French Government furnishing an annual subsidy for the purpose through the *Alliance Française*.

In the seventies of the 19th century French was made optional with German in the seventh and eighth grades of the New York city public schools. In the nineties of the 19th century French was introduced into the elementary grades of the Boston public schools. Unsatisfactory re-

sults, due apparently to a lack of competent teachers, led shortly, however, to the discontinuance of the plan.

Today French is taught, outside of New Orleans, in the public elementary schools of the country only in New York City, where it is elective with German and Spanish in the 8A and 8B grades. It is not taught in all the elementary schools of the city, the choice of the particular language to be pursued in any one school being left in the hands of the board of superintendents.

It is clear that French instruction in the elementary public schools has made little progress in spite of the recommendation of the Committee of Fifteen of the National Educational Association, in 1894, that one year of foreign language (Latin, French, or German) be included in the work of the eighth grade—a reiteration of a similar recommendation by the U. S. Commissioner of Education in 1868.

German instruction in the denominational schools of the colonies began much later than the missionary French instruction already mentioned. It dates from 1702 in Germantown, Pennsylvania, and was at first conducted prevalingly by the pastors of the churches. It was used primarily as a means of religious and ethical instruction and as a means of imbuing the children of German immigrants with respect for the traditions and ideals of their parents. It was unfortunately often assigned to men chosen rather for their pecuniary availability than for their skill as teachers. It was also confined, naturally, to the children of parents who already spoke the language, did not affect, therefore, the education of other American children, and remained without direct influence upon our American life. The foregoing applies likewise to similar early efforts at teaching German in Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas and elsewhere.

Benjamin Franklin, prompted, no doubt, by his desire to include in our American system of education an effective introduction to the life and foremost literature of Europe, effected the inclusion of modern language instruction in the curriculum of the Public Academy of the City of Philadelphia, founded in 1743. This institution later became the University of Pennsylvania. William Creamer (Krämer) the first holder of this chair, taught French and German from 1754 to 1775, and became thus the earliest college teacher of German in America. Benjamin Franklin himself in 1766 attended a meeting and was made a member of the Royal Society of Science in Göttingen, becoming thus the first American on record as visiting a German university. America's intellectual acquaintance with Germany had begun promisingly enough through the double influence of our own German blood and of the alertness of certain leaders of American life who craved for the welfare of

our new commonwealth light from whatever source. As gratitude to Lafayette and other French sympathizers with our own Revolution mingled with and intensified our academic interest in the French language and literature, it is also certain that Frederick the Great's opposition to England's employment of Hessian troops against our Revolutionary army and the substantial service of Baron von Steuben in the organization and employment of that army contributed not a little to the interest felt by Franklin and others in the German language and literature. But we as colonies naturally shared England's recognition of the fact that the language of polite society was French and her relative ignorance of German literature and philosophy. Not, therefore, until Madame de Staëls *De l'Allemagne*, translated into English and published in England in 1814, came to America did we begin to suspect that German thought and literature were of such importance as to entitle them to immediate and protracted attention.

The words of the gifted Frenchwoman expressing first-hand observation of her German neighbors had profoundly influenced a few young Americans of that day. She had written: "All the north of Germany is filled with the most learned universities in Europe. In no country, not even in England, have the people so many means of instructing themselves and of bringing their faculties to perfection; — the literary glory of Germany depends altogether upon these institutions." Among the young Americans impressed by these words was George Ticknor. He decided to study at a German university. The scantiness of our means of learning German at that time is reflected in his inability to find any one in Boston who could give him lessons in the language; in his employment for that purpose of an Alsatian teacher of mathematics, a Dr. Brosius, living at Jamaica Plains; in his sending to New Hampshire for a dictionary, and in his borrowing from his friend Edward Everett of a German copy of Goethe's *Werther*, as a text for his reading. With Edward Everett Ticknor spent the years 1815—17 in study abroad, largely at the University of Göttingen. Everett wrote from England in 1819 shortly after leaving the continent that America had little to learn from England for the development of her universities but very much from Germany. The example of Ticknor and Everett was followed in the succeeding four decades by numerous American students. Names like George Bancroft, G. H. Calvert, R. W. Emerson, H. W. Longfellow, J. S. Motley, B. L. Gildersleeve, Francis J. Child, E. T. Harris, G. M. Lane, W. D. Whitney, Th. D. Woolsey, G. L. Prentiss, H. B. Smith, F. H. Hedge, W. C. King, B. A. Gould, George William Curtis, and Timothy Dwight suggest the eminence of the intellectual leadership

that in the first half of the 19th century introduced America to things worth while in German life, thought, and educational institutions.

The appointment at Harvard in 1825 of Karl Follen as professor of church history and ethics, with an opportunity to form a class in German, occurred at a moment favorable for the influence of an enthusiastic teacher of the German language and literature to the American public. Follen's success in his teaching of German and the simultaneous extension of interest in the subject in many parts of the country appears in his inaugural address delivered in 1831, when formally appointed to a professorship of German for the period of five years. He says: "There are now German teachers and German books in all important cities in this country." His outspoken advocacy of antislavery prevented Follen's reappointment in 1836, to be sure, but it endeared him to a large and influential class of thoughtful Americans. It would take us too far a field to trace in detail the profound influence of German schools and universities upon our American institutions in the 19th century through the efforts of men like John Griscom, Alexander D. Bache, C. E. Stowe, Victor Cousin (translation of Cousin's educational report of 1837), Horace Mann, Henry I. Tappen, James B. Angell, and Daniel C. Gilman. It will suffice to recall 1) that our common-school system, as it exists today, is modeled directly after the Prussian common school system which Cousin, Mann, and others had, after careful examination, recommended as the most satisfactory model in existence; 2) that a new epoch of university teaching in this country dates from 1876, in which year the Johns Hopkins University, organized under the leadership of Daniel C. Gilman on the model of the German university, opened its doors to the public; and 3) that the *Kindergarten* was directly transplanted to this country from Germany. Margaretha Meyer (the wife of Carl Schurz) established the first American *Kindergarten* in Watertown, Wisconsin, in 1855, and was seconded in the succeeding years by hosts of others, including especially for New England, Elizabeth Peabody, the enthusiastic student of Fröbel and his work in Germany, who founded the *American Fröbel Union* at Boston in 1867. These three historical borrowings from Germany in the establishment of our educational institutions in the nineteenth century could not fail to focus national attention upon the language and literature of the lender. They have had much to do with securing for German increasing attention alongside French in our general scheme of modern language instruction.

Secondary school instruction in modern foreign languages has steadily increased during the second half of the nineteenth century and the opening years of the twentieth. In this it has kept pace with and in some cases surpassed the growing attention of American colleges and

universities to modern language instruction. This parallel increase in secondary school and college has been substantially supported by the closer articulation of these two types of institution, effected in the last two decades. Statistics compiled by Charles Hart Handschin for this pamphlet on *The Teaching of Modern Languages in the United States* and published in 1913 as Bulletin No. 3 of the U. S. Bureau of Education give a vivid picture of this expansion. Data collected by Mr. Handschin for 1910 show that of 50 high schools in the principal cities of the country 66 per cent offer four years of German, 22 per cent three years, and 12 per cent two years. In 1893 the Committee of Ten of the National Education Association recommended three years of French or German for the high school classical and Latin-scientific courses; four years of French and three of German or vice-versa for the modern language course, and four years of Latin, or French, or German for the English Course. This recommendation has been repeatedly endorsed by the National Bureau of Education. While the full execution of this plan remains for the country as a whole a pious wish, many sections have been moving steadily in the direction suggested.

German in the grades of our public schools has shared the fortune of French. Each language received initial consideration as a subject of instruction in the grades through deference to the wishes of the French or German speaking portion of the taxpayers. Not pedagogical but political considerations were decisive. Hence a periodic dissatisfaction with the arrangement, wherever such had been made, is an outstanding feature of this movement. In certain parts of the country French and German were early employed as the chief medium of instruction in various public grade schools to the distress of the state board of education. The natural desire of such boards to establish English as the official language of the whole country and to secure ample room for it in the instruction of the elementary schools condemned the practice. Even after this wholesale employment of a modern foreign language, as medium of instruction in other branches had disappeared, French and German in the grades have retained some of this earlier odium, have generally been accorded but grudging attention, and have retained their place in the curriculum mainly out of political regard for the French or German vote. Another reason for the generally unsatisfactory results obtained throughout the country from elementary instruction in French or German in the grades is the helter-skelter articulation of this work with the language-work of the high school. This is illustrated by Handschin's statistics for the year 1910: Out of 56 schools 13 gave German instruction in the grades as follows: Seven in grades 1 to 8; one in grades 1 to 6, one in grades 3 to 8; one in grades 4 to 8; one in grades

5 to 8, one in grades 6 to 8, and one in grade 8 only. It is reasonably certain that the local influence of the taxpayer rather than pedagogical insight produced this sliding scale of practice. The recent onslaught upon German in the grade schools of Hoboken, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and other cities of the country at the instance of those professing to speak in the name of patriotism would have met a more stubborn and a more intelligent resistance if the presence of German in the grade curricula had been dictated solely by educational considerations. No man who has given the matter of modern language instruction any serious attention has failed to observe that foundation-laying for subsequent mastery, can in the case of foreign languages best be effected under proper instruction by pupils in the seventh and eighth grades rather than by those of high school age. Sound-values, sentence-rhythm, idiom and vocabulary—matters of prime importance for the beginner—can be appropriated more easily and more thoroughly by the younger rather than by the older pupil. This is true chiefly because the muscles that control the speech-organs are still plastic, the power of oral imitation is still strong, and the memory for auditory symbols is still keen. This applies with equal cogency to all modern languages. As far as I know, there is practically unanimous assent to these assertions. The inference I would draw from them seems, however, not to have been drawn. It would seem to me clear that such considerations warrant finding a place in the grade curriculum for thorough work in some one foreign modern language, even at the expense of deferred work in natural science or mathematics. It should not necessarily be work in German. French or Spanish might be equally valuable for the purpose. It should be offered on a basis quite devoid of nationalistic tinge and should be determined, in case of the individual school, by the availability of thoroughly competent instruction. Competent teaching for this work in the grades has not been easy to obtain. Much of the recent objection to German in the grades of our public schools has derived its chief point from the indubitable weakness of this instruction. In this connection I quote the words of Professor Judd of the School of Education of the University of Chicago. He writes in the *Elementary School Journal*, October 17, 1917, by way of editorial comment upon the utterances of the *New York Times*, the *Duluth Herald*, and the *Omaha World*. "Neither the German language nor any other language should be taught in public schools *** for the purpose of preventing the successful assimilation as American citizens of those who are of foreign birth or descent. It is extremely doubtful, moreover, if any substantial benefit comes from teaching German or other foreign languages in the grade schools under any circumstances. It is there that English and the common elements

of knowledge should be thoroughly inculcated. The study of other languages, it would seem, might better wait for the high school and college years, when the assimilation of culture on a broader scale is properly attempted. To teach German anywhere to further alienism and German propaganda is bad business—bad business for America and bad for the Germans in America. The *Herald* is right in that. It is just as right in saying: "The German language ought not to be thrown out of the schools simply because we are at war with Germany and utterly disapprove of her spirit, her government, her aims, and her methods." Long after this war is over the German language will live. It will continue to be the key to a great and priceless literature and to an immense storehouse of riches, scientific and philosophical, that are of enduring value to the world. The United States might be able to do without it, if it were foolish enough to wish it and to assume that heavy handicap. But the United States will not wish it, and no more will any other nation now at war with Germany."

I heartily agree with the contention of the press and of Professor Judd that no language-teaching should be tolerated in the grade schools on nationalistic or alienistic grounds. It seems to me, however, a far cry from this entirely reasonable view to the further contention that German, or French, or Spanish should not be taught in the grades, but should be reserved for later "years when the assimilation of culture on a broader scale is attempted." My objection to this inference recalls: 1) that "the assimilation of culture on a broader scale" in the high school and college is at present very seriously handicapped by deferred linguistic foundation-laying which properly belongs to that period of the child's development when the memory of auditory symbols and the power of imitation are still at their maximum; 2) that just these faculties are under favorable conditions in the grades employed to better purpose in linguistic foundation-laying than in the study of natural science or mathematics; and, 3) that the shift indicated would greatly facilitate both the language work and the "assimilation of culture on a broader scale" attempted by the schools. To guard against misunderstanding, I add that I by no means advocate the study of more than one foreign modern language in the grades in case of the individual pupil. This may be German, or French, or Spanish. There will still be plenty of work in foreign languages, for the grade pupil thus equipped upon his entrance into high school. What I do wish to emphasize is that his study of a foreign modern language in the grades invariably operates, when properly conducted, to facilitate his study of English by reason of the clearer light thrown upon the vernacular by countless discoveries of identity, resemblance, and contrast. And it should not be forgotten

that the mastery of the elements of one foreign language materially aids the individual in all subsequent linguistic study. Natural science or mathematics, displaced from the grades if necessary to make room for the language-study here advocated, are more readily grasped by the maturer reflective faculty of the older pupil. They also gain, therefore, rather than lose by the change proposed.

In conclusion, I urge that genuine reasons for the study of foreign modern languages are quite independent of motives of patriotism. We must frankly recognize the increasing closeness of the interdependence of the peoples of the earth in all fields of human interest. It is of prime importance for the nations in the vanguard of civilization to know each other at first hand through direct acquaintance with each other's accomplishments past and present. These accomplishments in history, literature, art, science, and human welfare are, one and all, matters of linguistic record. We are best equipped for grasping the bearing of these accomplishments upon our own problems and ideals, when we read at first hand the record up to the very minute, not depending upon an interpreter nor waiting for a tardy translation to appear. To fail to utilize for our own experiments in the tasks of civilization all the light obtainable from the experiments past and present of our neighbors elsewhere retards our national progress and reduces us to the rank of national and individual philistines. This is the real reason for including in our school and college curricula carefully planned and effectively taught courses in the leading modern foreign languages. Temporary international friendships or hostilities have little to do with the case. Perhaps the sanest reflection we could indulge in is that the most difficult enemy to overcome is the unknown enemy. To oppose a foe whose powers, resources, institutions, and ideals we guess largely through translations is a hopeless task. We should not add strength to our armor or weaken his defense by banishing his language from our plans of study.

I quote the words of President Judson in reply to the question whether the course in German was to be changed: "It is perfectly obvious that there is no prejudice against German literature or other higher things of German life in intelligent circles in this country. We are at war with the ruling of forces which have made Germany a danger to civilization and not against the finer forces which we hope some day will again be dominant in Germany."